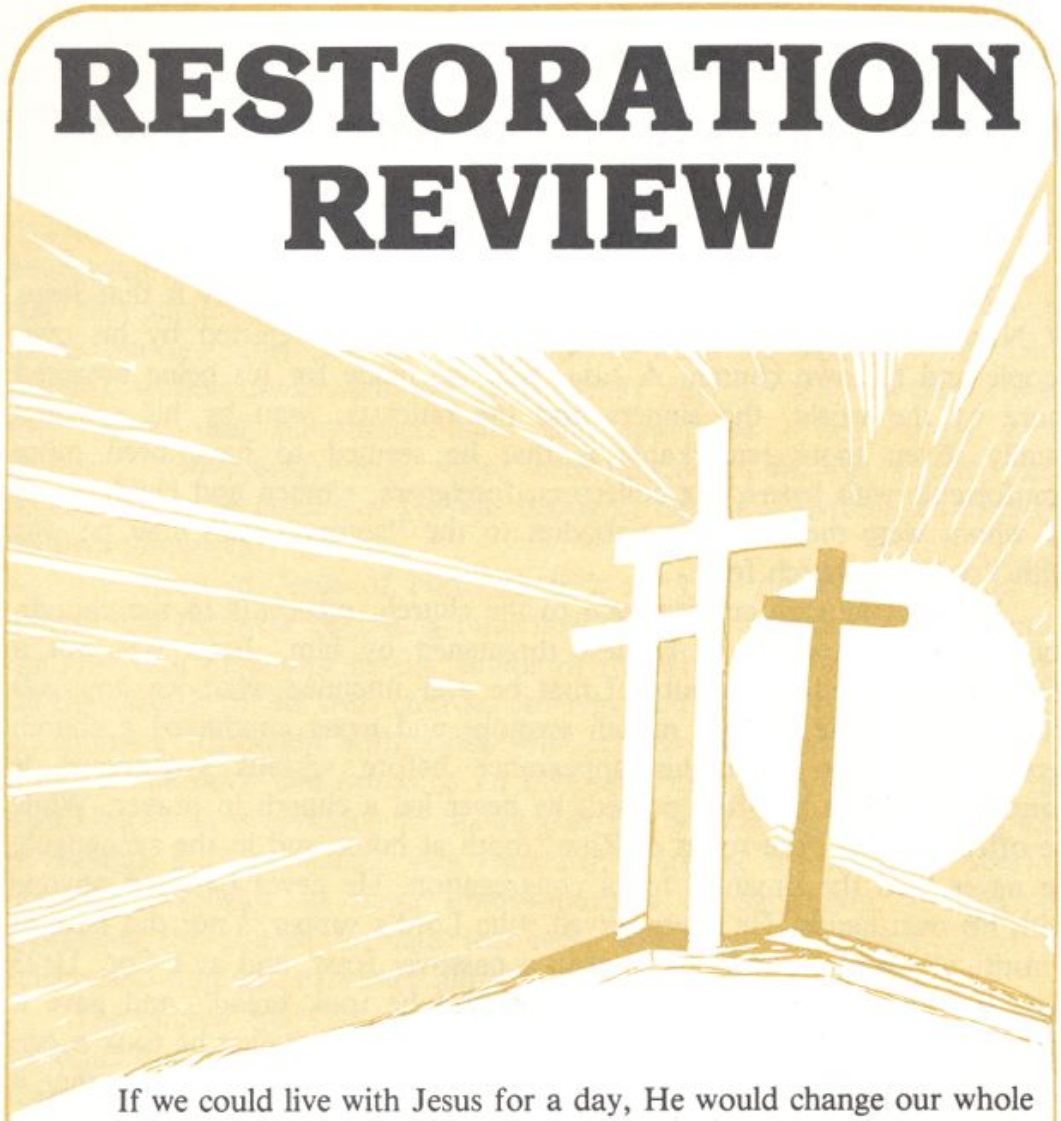
# RESTORATION REVIEW



If we could live with Jesus for a day, He would change our whole point of view. It would be a surgical experience. All our defenses would go down in the first hour. All our pride would crumble. All the excuses we make for ourselves, the lies behind which we hide, the comparisons with others which help us not to feel quite such awful sinners after all, would go before the burning of His eyes. The surgery done, He would nurse us back to spiritual health. — *Leslie Weatherhead*

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*Adventures of the Early Church . . .*

## JESUS SEEKS ENTRANCE TO HIS OWN CHURCH

*Behold, I stand at the door and knock.* — Rev. 3:20

One of the mysteries in the story of primitive Christianity is that Jesus of Nazareth, the hero of the story, was summarily rejected by his own people and his own church. A case could be made for his being accepted more by the world, the sinners and the outcasts, than by his spiritual family. Even more remarkable is that he seemed to have been more comfortable with lepers, tax collectors, foreigners, women and children, all of whom were more or less nobodies to the "somewhats," than he was with "proper" church folk.

Jesus remains an enigma even to the church, *especially* to the church, for the world appears to be less threatened by him. Jesus was not a "churchman" and it is doubtful that he ever intended what we now call "the church." He did not preach sermons and never conducted a church service, not even when his appearance before various synagogues is considered. While he often prayed, he never led a church in prayer. While he often chanted "the songs of Zion" both at home and in the synagogue, he never "led the singing" for a congregation. He never baptized anyone with his own hands. He never served "the Lord's supper," nor did he ever "institute" such. He rather shared in a passover feast, and as 1 Cor, 11:23 puts it, "In the night that he was betrayed he took bread" and gave it special meaning. They then had a feast together, after which he took a cup (probably the third cup of the passover celebration) and told them that it was "the new covenant in my blood," strange words indeed.

Had we been watching we could never have recognized it as anything like what we do on Sunday. If a reporter from the 20th century church had asked him if he had just "instituted" the Lord's supper, Jesus could only have been puzzled by such a question. He was a Jew, indeed the Jewish messiah, and he was once more celebrating the passover with his disciples, but this time he did something different with some of the usual things on the passover table. When he took the unleavened cakes that reminded them of the austerity of their past and said, "Take and eat, this is my body," they were probably as puzzled as they were when he told them of his impending death and resurrection. They were so very human and naive. Even that very night they were arguing among themselves as to who was the most important, and they were jockeying for the best seats at the table.

This indicates that even his own disciples rejected him, even if it was unintentional. They seemed incapable of understanding him, as with Peter, who that same night was reluctant to submit to footwashing at the hands of his master. Jesus now and again said to them the likes of "Then are you also without understanding?" (Mk. 7:18). And Mark states plainly that they simply did not understand Jesus and that "their hearts were hardened" (Mk. 6:52). And where were they when he was arrested and taken away to be crucified? He was betrayed, denied, and forsaken even by his own disciples.

The story of Jesus of Nazareth is a story of rejection. It could be argued that from the beginning until now that even the church has rejected the One that God sent as the Savior of the world. He has always stood on the *outside* of his own church, seeking what has really never been his, an intimate fellowship with those who profess to follow him. *Behold, I stand at the door and knock* is an invitation not to the world but to his own church. It is shocking to realize that the church was there, doing lots of things, but the Christ was excluded, standing at the door seeking entrance. As with all those seven churches in Revelation, the picture represents the church through the ages. Even the church has failed to understand him and to accept him.

The church has rejected Jesus in its exclusivism from the world. He intended that we be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, which means we are to be *in* the world, not only permeating it like leaven but overcoming it with goodness. The church actually fears a Jesus that moved with ease among society's untouchables. We are intimidated by the fact that Jesus would be more at home on a hippie pad or an inner-city street corner than with us in our cushioned pews and elegant pulpits. Jesus lived, served, and died *in the world,* while we distance ourselves from the world. Our church edifices are ghettoes for our exclusivism rather than halfway houses for suffering humanity. With all our real estate, our programs, our budgets, our "five acts of worship" meticulously executed, it is well to ask *Where is Jesus?*

The church has rejected him in its sectarianism and parochialism. Jesus came to his own sect, the Jewish cult, and that sect rejected him, as Jn. 1:11 indicates: "He came to his own and his own received him not." His own cult might have accepted him, as they would have any resourceful rabbi, if he could have accommodated his "new wine" to their old wine skins. Their system had to be preserved, and it was his demand for new wine skins (a spirit of catholicity) that led to his rejection. Jesus was catholic but his cult was parochial, and like the Jews of his day the church has been sectarian, rejecting the catholic spirit of Jesus. While the church pins on labels, Jesus ignored labels. While the church says, as did

Jesus' disciples, "We rejected the one who was casting out demons in your name because he was not of us," Jesus insisted on acceptance, noting that "He who is not against us is for us." (Lk. 9:49-50)

The church has rejected Jesus in the distinctions it makes in race, sex, and culture. All around the world the church is still largely racial, and that in countries that are yet oppressed by racial barriers. Cultural lines run deep, even in the western world. While Jesus was an integrationist, even to the point of "He reached out and touched the leper," which must be one of the great lines in the New Testament, the church is segregationist. It may be a benign segregation but segregation nonetheless. The church remains white and black, and the whites do not reach out and touch the blacks. The church is also mostly male-dominated. In most churches a 12-year old boy, if baptized, has more rights than any woman in the congregation, including the sister who is a corporate executive or the one who lectures at a nearby university. Women are almost never consulted in the decision making process. In Jesus' church they hold second-class membership, while Jesus himself not only ministered alongside women but selected one of them as the very first envoy of the good news, as Jn. 20:17-18 indicates.

The church has rejected Jesus in the values it has chosen rather than the one great value of the spirit of Jesus Christ. A minister is hired and elders are selected in terms of their ability to manage the program, meet the budget, and satisfy the membership rather than for their ability to communicate the spirit of Christ. Indeed, the modern church as well as the ancient one finds the spirit of Christ scandalous. The one who washed the feet of sinful men, associated with the dregs of society, and forgave those who abused him stands as a stranger at our door. Even the New Testament documents seem incapable of portraying the full glory of the spirit of Christ. One passage assures us that a world full of books could not tell the story (Jn. 21:25), while another tells us that it surpasses all our efforts to communicate (Eph. 3:19-20), and yet another reminds us that we look through a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12). We preserve the values of institutional religion while we obstruct the free spirit of Christ, along with love, joy, peace, forgiveness, and forbearance.

"Be like Jesus" is an ideal we sing about and talk about, but no party really wants this of its members. The church has not only rejected Jesus, leaving him at the door knocking, but it has always rejected the spirit of Jesus in whomever it might appear. This is evident whenever one's love transcends the party and reaches out to others as equals. "Be like Jesus" means be a good Mormon, a good Mennonite, or a good Methodist. It is much more serious to question a sect's prophecies or its position on baptism than to be unloving or unforgiving.

The good news in all this is not only that Jesus is always there, no farther away than the front door, but there is always those precious few that open their hearts to the imploring Christ. Never forget the remnant! Throughout salvation history there has been the faithful remnant, as in Isaiah's time: "If the Lord of hosts had not left for us a remnant, we should have been like Sodom and Gomorrah" (Isa 1:9). The remnant is always there, including some in those seven churches of Asia in Revelation, as fallen as they were.

Perhaps it is the remnant in all the denominations that is the true church, those who open the door and invite Jesus in. And the Lord is the Gentleman of gentlemen as well as the Lord of lords. He will not barge in and impose himself. In his case the latch is on the *inside.* We are to open the door of our hearts and welcome him in for that loving and meaningful fellowship that only he can give.

More good news is that even in an erring church (Is there any other kind?) the least of the sisters or brothers can open the door to Jesus. "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me," says the beseeching Christ. The pope or the bishop does not have to open the door, not even the elders or the minister or the program committee. *If anyone will open* . . . It is the great invitation and it is to his own church, to anyone in that church.

It may be that even in a large church Jesus is there because of the few who really seek to make their heart his hearth. And that may answer the oft-asked question, *When does a church cease to be Jesus' church?* When there is no one there that hears his voice and no one who will open the door and invite him Jn. He may eventually turn away and knock no more. But more good news is that he is our longsuffering Lord. So much so that he may accept things in the institutional church that he never intended, *so long* as there is some concern for the spirit of Christ.

And it is those who are concerned for the spirit of Christ who hear the knock at the door. There is no question about *his* faithfulness, for he is always there at the threshold of our hearts and lives, waiting for us. It is our faithfulness that is in question. The ball is in our court. — *the Editor.*

It isn't that we don't believe in a living Christ. Proofs of the Resurrection are not what we need. In fact there is scarcely anything we need to *know* about Him. We just need to know Him. — *Leslie Weatherhead*

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## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FORGIVE?

"I had been a Christian for many years before I *really* believed in the forgiveness of sins, or more strictly before my theoretical belief became a reality to me. I fancy this may not be too uncommon." —C. S. Lewis in *Letters to An American Lady*

In view of the above quotation C. S. Lewis would probably agree with the aged minister's response to the question of what he would emphasize most in his preaching if he had his life to live over. *The forgiveness of sins,* he said. If we ponder the reality of it — that our sins, some open and despicable and some secret and shameful, are forgiven by God who is full of pity and mercy — it is almost too much for us. Pascal, who was at home with great ideas, saw forgiveness of sins as the most staggering of all human concepts.

Forgiveness is at the heart of the great devotional psalms, and the authors, like Lewis and Pascal, treat it as being as incomprehensible as it is glorious. David came to realize that God "discernest my thoughts from afar" and "art acquainted with all my ways," even to a knowledge of "before a word is on my tongue, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether." This led him to say, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain it (Psa. 139.6).

While David's sin involved several people, he was so moved by the magnificence of God that he said in another psalm, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned," and then went on to plead for forgiveness, "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow." Finally he names the condition of God's forgiveness: "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17).

Psa. 103 describes forgiveness as the removal of one's guilt far from the presence of God: "As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us." Micah 7:19 puts it in similar terms: "He will again have compassion upon us, he will tread our iniquities under foot. Thou wilt cast all our sins into the depths of the sea." This

is depicted early on in the life of Israel when Aaron laid his hands upon a live goat and confessed over him all the sins of the people and then sent him away far into the wilderness. Lev. 16:22 thus reads: “The goat shall bear all their iniquities upon him to a solitary land; and he shall let the goat go in the wilderness.” This is the glory of forgiveness: sins are cast into the depths of the sea where they cannot be recovered; they are as far removed as the east is from the west and are no longer in the presence of God; they are consigned to the solitary regions of the wilderness and are no longer in the consciousness of God. Even the Old Testament recognizes that such a blessing as forgiveness comes only by the grace of God. “The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love,” we are told in Psa. 103:8, and that psalm goes on to say, “He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor requite us according to our iniquities” and even “As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him.” This is the grace of God, his unconditional love, and his eagerness to forgive. And to forgive means that He takes our sins and removes them far from His presence, casting them into the depths of the sea, never to haunt us anymore. This is the grace that is greater than all our sins.

Forgiveness of sins is to be horizontal as well as vertical, for it is only as we forgive one another that God forgives us. It is remarkable that Jesus emphasized this truth as he taught his disciples to pray. “Forgive us our trespasses,” he taught them to pray, “as we forgive those who trespass against us.” And he went on to tell them, “for if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father also will forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (Mt 5:14-15). This does not mean that God is obligated to forgive us if we forgive, for forgiveness is always a matter of God’s grace, just as it is grace on our part when we forgive others. If a person “deserves” forgiveness, it is not true forgiveness that is extended.

Recently when I spoke on the Lord’s prayer, I warned that one should not pray the Lord’s prayer if there are those he will not forgive. A sister told me afterwards that she was disturbed by what I had said, for there were those that had so severely abused her family that there was no way she could forgive. Knowing something of the trials she had gone through, I could share her agony, but I nonetheless urged her to deal with her problem in prayer and to refuse an unforgiving attitude as final. I conceded that the circumstances that had engulfed her might be greater than her power to forgive, and that she would have to allow the Christ to forgive her persecutors through her. “You can allow him to take over your heart to such a degree that he forgives them through you,” I assured her. “After all, look at the forgiveness of Jesus on the Cross,” I added.

The older I grow and the more extensive my experience among the churches, the more persuaded am I that an unforgiving spirit is both deep and widespread among us. Most Christians harbor hurts, insults, resentment, and maltreatment of various sorts. Such feelings run deep in every church and there is hardly a family that is not bruised by them. It is common for those who belong to the same church to avoid any kind of close fellowship, and it is amazing how some folk can attend the same congregation for years without ever speaking to each other. Many there are who avoid family gatherings if "he" or "she" or "they" are to be there, of if they attend they manage to avoid any close contact and it is often a brother or a sister or even a parent. I have made a point of asking a number of people lately, and I find that most people have a problem forgiving. And those same people suppose they have good reason for their feelings — "After all, look what they did to me!, "they will say. Most of the reasons are probably good ones. Our Lord certainly had a good reason for not forgiving as he hanged suspended on the Cross. Look at what they did to him!

Neither have I been immune to the malady of an unforgiving spirit, especially toward those who would hurt those close to me. It is one of those things I have had to "work on" in my heart of hearts, now and again through the years. That, I am persuaded, is crucial to the problem, *that we keep working at it, weeding out the hurt feelings by means of God's sustaining grace.* If down deep in our hearts we have the *desire* to forgive, even when we find it very difficult, we are close to forgiveness. It is when resentment turns to hate and vengeance and we don't want to forgive that we are in trouble.

I have worked out some conclusions that may prove helpful to those who have trouble forgiving or with their feelings toward certain people. Some of the points have to do with correcting some misconceptions. Given the idea some people have of it, forgiveness is impossible.

1. *Forgiveness is not forgetting.* I find no relationship between forgiveness and forgetting, though this is a common view. We can of course "forget" in the sense that we do not let it dominate our thoughts or influence our attitude or behavior. If someone borrows money from you and refuses to repay, even when he can, there is no way for you to "forget" this in the sense that you are no longer aware of it. But you can at last forgive him in that you will not allow it to affect the way you feel toward him or treat him. Like God has done your sins against him, you can cast the old debt into the depths of the sea with no intention of recovering it. This means you will have no "list" of grievances, and you will never again remind him of it in the event of a confrontation with him.

No woman can forget the long years of abuse she took from the man she has since divorced. The old hurts are hard to forgive and impossible to forget. But after years of growing closer to the forgiving Christ she can forgive in that she can now pray that her once abusive husband will find his way to a good life and peace with God. Forgiveness has to do with what you want for the one who has wronged you. So long as you want him to have to "pay for it" or to "get it in the neck" or to go to hell for his foul deeds, you have not forgiven. It is when you now have goodwill in your heart toward him. You hope to see him in heaven with God, and you can pray that way. That is forgiveness. But that has nothing to do with forgetting. You will always remember, of course, but it will not matter anymore.

2. *Forgiveness in not approval and not even liking.* Sometimes when you refer to forgiveness the way Jesus did — "Forgive seventy times seven" — they will throw Hitler at you or perhaps the man who raped and murdered their daughter. In learning to forgive one must set more modest goals, such as forgiving your neighbor who allows his dog to befoul your lawn or the teacher who doesn't grade your child the way you think she should or the person at the office who is always putting you down. In any case, we can forgive a person without approving of what he does. You can forgive the man for the debt he refuses to pay while still believing that he ought to pay it. You can forgive the one who gossips about you without approving of gossiping.

The woman who has at last forgiven her abusive husband is not obligated, therefore, to invite him to family gatherings. She can love him *(agape* love) without liking him (he forever destroyed that), and she can forgive him without associating with him. We all know people that we would not choose as companions, and we do not care to associate with them. But we can still love them, even if we do not like them, and we can forgive them if need be. The delicate line is in the nature of true Christian love: "Love (forgiveness) wills no ill to its neighbor" (Rom. 13:10). If we truly *will* nothing but good for the one who has wronged us we have the forgiving spirit. Love and forgiveness are the same in such contexts, for forgiveness is the expression of love toward the one who has abused us. Ideally, forgiveness should express itself in doing something good for the person, certainly in our secret prayers, but also if possible in some good deed. That makes for a good prayer: let us ask the Lord to give us an opportunity to do such a one some kind deed, even if (better if) he never knows about it.

3. *We can forgive others on the same basis we forgive ourselves*. This breaks it down to a size that we can handle. There are things I do not like about myself, and I am sometimes disgusted with myself. I strongly disapprove (even hate) some of my own actions. But still

I have a forgiving attitude toward myself. I wish myself well. I seek peace and reconciliation for myself however wayward I may become. I am *for* myself; I seek those resources that will make me strong and give me victory eventually. And so I continue to be forgiving toward myself, however badly I may treat myself.

Is this not the key to forgiving others? I can hate what they do but still love them and forgive them. I can be on their side even when I disapprove. I can *will* them good even when they maltreat me.

This must be what Jesus was getting at when he taught that we are to love others as we love ourselves. If I always love me even when I do not like me, cannot I show this kind of forbearance toward very unlikeable people, including those that would do me in? I can believe that people are guilty and still love them, just as I can believe I am guilty while I love me.

C. S. Lewis, who never learned as much about forgiveness as he desired, pointed to one sure test. However disappointed we may be in ourselves, we always want to believe the best about ourselves, and so we do not put the worst possible interpretation on what we do. We are gracious, forbearing, forgiving toward ourselves. We want to believe the best about ourselves, even when the news is bad.

Are we that way toward others? That is the test. If we hear something bad about an enemy or someone who has done us dirt, are we pleased to hear it? Do we put the best or the worst interpretation on what such a one does? If a second report reveals that what he did was not so bad after all, are we pleased or disappointed?

This gets at the heart of forgiveness. When we love (forgive) others as we love (forgive) ourselves, then we can meaningfully pray the Lord's prayer. It is then that the heavenly Father will forgive us out of his overflowing grace and mercy.

Those of us who are concerned for the unity of all Christians realize that it is basically the condemning, judgmental, unforgiving spirit that keeps us drawing lines on each other. When we have that heart that prays even in the face of blatant cruelty, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do," a factious spirit will be intolerable. — *the Editor.*

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## MEANING GOES BEYOND FACTS

*There came a voice from heaven . . . The multitude said that it had thundered . . . Others said, "An angel has spoken to him."* —Jn. 12:28-29

As crucial as facts are, and as stubborn, the search for truth does not end there. Poetry, music, art, philosophy, and perhaps even architecture are efforts to get beyond mere facts.

Such as the meaning of being human. Once the scientists list all the known facts about man, we know that the truth about being human goes beyond that. So with our universe. The biologist can write volumes about life processes, as can the botanist about plants, the zoologist about animals, and the astronomer about stars. But facts are not the whole story. This is what makes for mystery. Even after a lifetime of being human, and with our own facts about life, we are still awed by the mystery of the nature of things. We do not even understand ourselves, however many facts we have.

The Scripture referred to above shows how facts and mystery are strangely intermingled. Jesus is praying, "Father, glorify thy name." A voice comes from heaven in response, "I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again." The text says that the crowd heard the voice — or something. Some said it had thundered, while others said an angel had spoken to Jesus. But Jesus heard the voice of God.

We have no way of knowing *how* Jesus heard the voice of God. He heard such a voice at his baptism, at his transfiguration, and sometimes when he prayed, as in this instance. The voice was not as clear to others.

Some said it thundered. Perhaps there was thunder. Others heard more, an angel's voice perhaps. But Jesus received a message from God. Even if we could list all the facts in this episode, it is evident that its meaning transcends what is actually written. Herein we have the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Facts provide the knowledge, while wisdom is the gift of God. We are to pray for wisdom, not knowledge, for knowledge comes through learning facts. Wisdom reaches beyond the facts. Paul implies that this "spirit of wisdom" comes when "the eyes of your heart are enlightened," which is the mission of the Holy Spirit in the believer (Eph. 1:17-18).

We are to teach faithfully the facts about baptism, but we must realize that the Bible gets beyond the *form* of baptism to its deeper meaning, using such terms as "a circumscision made without hands" and "the working of God" (Col. 2:11-12).

So with the Lord's Supper or singing or prayer. And so with all of Scripture. The facts may be simple enough. Indeed, we have a thunderstorm of facts. But what do they really mean? Prayer is words, yes, but more than words. Shakespeare said this when he had a character say, "My prayers go up but my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go." And we all know that there is more to baptism than getting wet. There is the fact of baptism and the essence of baptism. If the fact is somehow confused but the "circumcision of the heart" is there, is the meaning still there?

We see how meaning reaches beyond the facts in the story of Jesus. The gospel narratives are filled with facts, but isn't the Christ far more than all the facts? The facts may be clear enough on what happened in the upper room when Jesus washed his disciples feet, but when the reality of "God of the towel" impacts our hearts and scores our pride we know the truth is more than words on a page.

This may be what it means to be taught by the Holy Spirit and that the Scriptures must be "spiritually discerned" as 1 Jn. 2:27 and 1 Cor. 2:14 indicate.

It is in order for us to be "people of the Book" so long as we are also people of the Spirit. It is our peril when we come down hard for the letter while neglecting the Spirit.

At a recent conference for Church of Christ people a woman described her frustration of not being able to share in the teaching ministry in her congregation, *because she was a woman.* She could run a business, lecture in a university, and take part in the performing arts, but in a Church of Christ she could not as much as pray.

We all felt her frustration, and it was evident that our people needed to move into the 20th century on this matter. But one brother, obviously smitten by the fact that the Church of Christ is "a man's church," made a sobering plea. His words reminded me that truth is not as easy to come by as we presume and that arrogance is oftentimes our master.

"Something is obviously wrong," he said, "We must find some way to interpret the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law."

He was saying that meaning is not simply what is written. There is a *spirit* to what is written. We can handle this with such injunctions as "If thy hand offend thee, cut it off," but we are slow to see that all of Scripture is to be interpreted in the light of the Spirit of Christ, for Jesus is Lord of the Bible as well as Lord of the Sabbath. If the letter of Sabbath

laws sometimes yielded to the spirit of those laws, which is always love, then the letter of biblical laws may sometimes yield to the spirit of those laws, which again is the law of love.

The meaning of Scripture always in some way touches the love of God. If that spirit is not there we have missed the meaning. This is why Paul assures us that "The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" (1 Tim. 1:5). When our interpretations produce hate and fear and insecurity we can know that we have not found the true meaning. — *the Editor.*

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## WHAT IS THE WORD OF GOD?

*By Mark Berrier*

Several years ago a student of mine, near the end of a class session, asked me, "Is the Bible the word of God, or does the Bible *contain* the word of God?" I told him I'd think carefully before answering, and would try to deal with the question the next day.

I had been reading and studying for myself concerning the same question. My struggle was the outgrowth of an interesting set of circumstances: I was studying full-time at a Catholic University and also teaching Hebrew at Wycliffe's Summer Institute of Linguistics, with every range of Protestantism in my classes. I was in the throes of trying to determine what I really did believe and why I believed it.

The next day, when I again met with the class, I shared this answer: "I believe the Bible *is contained* in the word of God." My explanation was, generally, as follows:

The word of God exists with at least five dimensions: (1) Christ, (2) preaching and teaching of the prophets and apostles, (3) Scripture, (4) in nature, (5) in me.

1. *The word of God is, first of all, the Christ.*

> "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was what God was. He was in the beginning with God. . . . And the word became. . . ."

In Gen. 1, every creative act of God is prefaced with, “And God said. . . .” Even Karl Barth began his work with Christ as word of God. No Christian would deny this: Christ is primary word of God.

2. *The word of God is in the preaching of the prophets and of the apostles.*

Some such phrase as “The word of the Lord came to” appears hundreds of times in the prophets of old. And as for the apostles, John says: “This is the message we have heard from him. . . .” (my emphasis), and Paul says, “I received this gospel by revelation from Jesus Christ.” And Peter: “We did not follow cleverly invented stories . . ., but we were eyewitness of his majesty. . . . We ourselves heard the voice of God that came from heaven. . . .” And again John: “We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us; but whoever is not from God does not listen to us.” (1 Jn. 4:6). Thus the earliest preachers and teachers of both testaments expressed the word of God.

3. *The word of God is recorded in Scripture.*

The central way that we of this century know of the Christ and the apostles and prophets is through what is written. The old and the new testament scriptures are leveled by Paul; in 1 Tim. 5:18 he says, “For the Scripture says, ‘Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain,’ and ‘The worker deserves his wages’.” Thus he refers to Dt. 25:4 *and* Luke 10:7 as Scripture, placing the word of God through Moses on the same level as the word of Christ. Further, in Rom. 9:17, Paul quotes a message which was spoken directly by God himself to Pharaoh of Egypt, as follows: “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘I raised you up for this purpose, that I might be proclaimed in all the earth.’” Thus, when it is really God who speaks, Paul says, “The Scripture says. . . .” And Peter says (2 Pt. 3:15-16).

> Bear in mind that our Lord’s patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.

So Peter levels Paul’s writings with “the other scriptures.” Scripture is, therefore, word of God.

4. *The word of God is available in nature.*

Ps. 19:1-4 says,

> The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech, night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.

And Paul quotes this same psalm to show that all men have heard the word (Rom. 10:17). Again, it is Paul who observes that all men know about God: (Rom. 1:18ff).

> The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities — his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

That same *Logos* who said, "No one comes to the father except through me," may be contacted in nature. His truth may be revealed *in part* even by other religions.

C. S. Lewis has a worshipper of a false god in heaven in his seventh book of the "Chronicles of Narnia" — *The Last Battle.* This worshipper was apparently such a devout follower of the light he had, that Lewis gives him the name "Emet" the Hebrew word for "truth" or "faithfulness." Lewis implies that, although Emet appeared in this life before a false god, he was actually worshipping the true God in his heart. Note Naaman in 2K 5:17f where he says to Elijah:

> If you will not (receive payment for teaching me), please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the Lord. But may the Lord forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also — when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the Lord forgive your servant for this.

Besides, Paul is found quoting pagan sources in at least three places. In Acts 17:28 he quotes Aratus, in Titus 1:12 he quotes Epimenides, a pagan writing from the seventh century B.C., and in 1 Cor. 15:33 he quotes Menander. Other NT writers quote or refer to sources such as the Ascension of Isaiah, the Assumption of Moses, Baruch, and the books of Maccabees. Therefore the word of God is in part available in nature.

5. *The most difficult and abstruse dimension of the word of God is the word of God in me.*

The Old Covenant was written by God on stone. The New Covenant has been (and is being) written by the Spirit in our hearts. Jeremiah prophesies (31:31-34) that the New Covenant God will write "in their minds" and "in their hearts." Hebrews 8:7-13 quotes Jeremiah and amplifies the inner, personal nature of the New Covenant.

So the word of God is *in me.* "Your word I have treasured up in my heart, that I may not sin against you." (Ps. 119:11)

Of this five-dimensional word, I believe the scripture to be word of God in a unique sense. The scripture claims for itself that it is "Godbreathed, useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness." (2 Tim. 3:16) In some sense the words of scripture *do* proceed from the mouth of God. Does this "God-breathedness" mean that we must claim for scripture what it does not claim for itself, that it is "infallible" and "inerrant," whatever is meant by that? Do we want to have some kind of infallible, *de fidei* "paper pope"? Is scripture to be worshipped? Must we sing to it: "Holy Bible, Book Divine, Precious treasure, thou art mine:. . . Mine thou art to guide and guard, Mine to punish and reward"? Are we to attribute any book what rightfully belongs to the Lord Himself? Can we say that it is the final authority when it itself says that Jesus Christ has all authority given to him? And in what way can a book, based on 5,000 manuscripts with over 100,000 differences between them be termed "infallible and inerrant"? Such claims are a saccharine-spread veneer across the raw dynamic of the Word of God.

Although the Bible contains accounts of lies, perfidy, mistaken ideas, Satan's words, murder and adultery, I take them to be accurate. If I have any concept of "inspiration" of Scripture, it is based on the Hebrew word *Dabhar.* The lexicons give its meanings as: word, saying, message, report, matter, affair, thing, act, *event* (emphasis mine). The book of Chronicles is entitled "words of" or "events of" in the Hebrew text. Thus, the event and the record of the event are seen by the Jews as being on the same, equal; i.e., the scripture agrees with the reality.

Therefore, I believe scripture to be an accurate record of God's interaction with men. If it is God-breathed, then His Spirit works through it, and it includes all the necessary elements God would have us know and do. It is a vehicle to show us Christ, whose

purpose was to show us God. (John 1:18; 14:9) Christ is the mediator of the new and better covenant, which is written in our hearts. — *Dallas Christian College, 2700 Christian Pkwy., Dallas, TX 75234*

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## BALANCING BAPTISM

*By Edward Fudge*

The subject of balancing baptism is so large, and there are so many ways of approaching it, that I want to offer "stimulators" instead of "conclusions." What follows are nine such "stimulators," which I hope will send your mind scurrying as your fingers do the walking through the pages of the New Testament on this subject.

1. The word "gospel" means "good news." The gospel tells us that God, in Jesus Christ, has set sinners right with himself. Since that saving deed is already done, nothing we do in response to its announcement can be any part of the work that actually sets us right with God. It is of the essence of the gospel that the saving work was done *outside* of us, *for* us. Whatever water baptism is — or does — must be understood and described with this clearly in mind.

2. The outward rite of baptism in water expresses and draws meaning from an inward confidence in God's promise of salvation. Faith does not express or draw meaning from baptism. We should measure baptism by faith. We should not measure faith by baptism.

3. Scripture associates with baptism such concepts as salvation, cleansing, remission of sins, the Holy Spirit and union with Christ. It also associates all these concepts with faith. These blessings belong to baptism *secondarily* — as it expresses and embodies faith. They do not belong to baptism *primarily*, as if it were something separate from faith or in addition to faith.

4. While the Book of Acts regularly joins baptism, remission of sins, and the gift of the Holy Spirit, it also demonstrates *God's freedom* in the order in which these elements appear. This same book records at least three different arrangements (Acts 2, 8, 10). Our people have chosen as a model Acts 2 (which involves the first Jewish converts). If we had chosen Acts 10 (which involves the first Gentile converts), we would have thought the

pattern was Believe/forgiveness of sins and receive the Holy Spirit/be baptized. The biblical pattern is diverse on this point. We must learn to recognize God's work and acknowledge it, in whatever order it may occur.

5. The only New Testament passage on "rebaptism" is Acts 19. There the criterion for valid baptism is gospel faith, and the sign of faith is the presence of the Holy Spirit. Where the Holy Spirit is present, there is faith. Where there is faith, rebaptism is uncalled for.

6. Christ has but one body and it includes all who belong to him. We have no earthly right to exclude from *our* fellowship any person we believe Christ has accepted into *his.* How can one say that another person is a Christian, filled with the fruit of God's Spirit, yet refuse that person the right hand of fellowship on the basis of a baptismal doctrine? This is the dilemma our tradition has forced upon us. It is our duty to wrestle with that dilemma today.

7. No New Testament passage explicitly defines baptism as immersion. That is its etymology, but etymology does not prove later usage. The evidence for immersion is certainly strong enough to justify our own practice. Is it really strong enough to rule out the practice of other Christians whose Greek scholars have a different view?

8. If immersion only is obedience to Christ, it must follow that the person being immersed understands *Jesus* to command this act. We might *persuade* someone that this is the case. We cannot *compel* beyond the light of another's personal conviction, however. God must be the Lord of each person's will and the judge of each person's conscience. In the name of the "obedience," have we actually made a mockery of "obedience" to Christ?

9. A friend once said to me, "I used to go out preaching baptism and I never saw anyone baptized. Now I go out preaching Christ, and I see people lined up waiting for baptism." I once proposed to a lunch table full of theologians from Baptist and Church of Christ institutions the following. "You Baptists have done a good job of preaching Christ, but you have sometimes neglected to promptly baptize those who believe. We Church of Christ folk have stressed the importance of baptism, but have often neglected to really preach Christ. If we will all be faithful to Christ's commission, we will be sure to preach Christ — and to baptize those who believe. When we both reform our practice, the argument between us will end." — *Box 21806, Houston, TX 77218*

These last two articles by Mark Berrier and Edward Fudge were presented to the Conference for Churches of Christ at Irving, Texas last month. Because of their high quality we wanted our readers to see them.

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## OUR CHANGING WORLD

The Eastern Heights Christian Church in Tulsa and the Highland Church of Christ in Louisville are cooperating in the support of David Brown, a missionary in South Africa, along with a native worker. Both churches see this as putting into practice the unity conferences now being conducted by Christian Churches and Churches of Christ.

The conferences in Conway, Arkansas and Irving, Texas, where “more open churches” were invited to share, had a unique feature in that they heard from former ministers who now serve other denominations. In Conway we heard from Bob Cannon, onetime minister to the Inglewood (CA) Church of Christ and missionary to South Africa, who now serves an Assembly of God in Eureka, CA, while in Irving we heard Robert Meyers, former professor at Harding University and minister to the Riverside Church of Christ in Wichita, who nows ministers to a Congregational Church in Wichita. Both men made impressive contributions and manifested a gracious spirit toward those they had left, and they were probably the most surprised of all, to be invited to share as equals with those who are inclined to divorce themselves from those who leave. It was a maturing experience for all concerned, and a prelude to what will one day be common, as we continue to grow in grace.

As this issue goes to press I am home from an uplifting visit to Oregon and California. In Portland, Oregon I was with the Central Church of Christ, spoke in chapel at Columbia Christian College, breakfasted with students, shared in a Bible class at the college, and addressed a preachers’ luncheon on “Betrayal of a Heritage.” In Bakersfield, CA I breakfasted with preachers, and at the Church of Christ in Exeter I spoke several times on our heritage in history and in Scripture. My next time out will be with Ouida in Arkansas City, KS, with the Random Road Chapel, March 28-30, and in April I make my longest

trip of the year, the Lord willing, all the way to Montevideo, Uruguay, as well as Buenos Aires, Argentina, just across the bay.

The Restoration Studies Center at ACU has acquired the old pulpit of the Ahorey Presbyterian Church in Rich Hill, Northern Ireland, from whence Thomas Campbell emigrated to America in 1807. That church is well aware of its role in our heritage. The Campbell Tower graces the 200-year old church and a stained-glass window honors Alexander Campbell. When I visited that church, its minister, Al Scott, a Campbellite himself of sorts, insisted that I stand in Campbell's old pulpit and minister somewhat, while he served as the audience. So I told the story of how the church on a Sunday back in about 1800 was invaded by the Irish Guard in search of rebels. An elder besought Thomas Campbell to pray, which was a sure way to frustrate any guard, for when brother Campbell prayed he prayed. In the prayer he quoted the whole of Ps. 46, which I read on the occasion. We are pleased that the old pulpit has come to Texas, an unlikely home for it but nonetheless an appropriate one. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ, after six years of covenantal work and study in which they sought visible unity, have agreed upon an "Ecumenical Partnership." It means that they will enjoy fellowship without actually becoming one denomination, which neither church seemed to want. They issued a joint "Declaration" on "The unity we seek" that speaks to us all, part of which reads: 'The unity we seek is not something we create through our own efforts or design; rather, the unity we seek comes as a gift from God to all those who follow Christ as their Lord and Savior. The unity does not depend on like-mindedness, nor is it destroyed by our diversity."

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## READERS' EXCHANGE

It has become undeniably clear that the independent Christian Churches/Churches of Christ are affected by the sectarian spirit. The basic difference between us and the other denominations is that we run our lines underground rather than out in the open. We know "us" from "them" nonetheless. We have been duped into believing that Scriptural warnings against denominationalism are only against the maintenance of state or national headquarters. Since our forefathers opposed written creeds, we do not write ours down, or else we do not call it a creed. —*Dane Tyner, Bellaire Christian Church, Tulsa, OK.*

We have left the churches of Christ and are attending a large interdenominational charismatic church. What life! We could not bear the sectarian spirit, the legalism, the humanism, the rationalism, the sacramentalism any longer. — *John Ponder, Tucson, AZ.*

(We should not only make it clear to those who leave us that we still love them and esteem them as equals in Christ, but we should visit with them and seek to learn from why they left. We may have corrections to make. I would be interested, for instance, in this brother's analysis of our "sacramentalism." I wonder if he means we have a sacramental view of baptism. The "rationalism" I understand. A sister left our Denton church recently with the charge that we are "too intellectual." As the British say, I heard her. We need to listen more to our critics than to those who praise us. —*Ed.)*

Pleadings before the supreme courts of Arkansas and Oklahoma and before a chancery court in Tennessee make it clear that members of the Church of Christ are no longer held to be the church, but are merely attendants or adherents of the institution, and that "the eldership" acting *en camera* is beyond the reach of either the members of the law. — *Norman Parks, Murfreesboro, TN.*

**Stormy Weather in Abilene**

About four weeks ago a book written by Bert Thompson, *Is Genesis Myth?,* came from the press. The 10,000 copies of the first printing were distributed in three weeks, which reflects the enormous interest in it. It lays out irrefutable evidence that at least two science professors at Abilene Christian University have been teaching evolution as a fact and have not provided any refutation of this blasphemous teaching. One of the professors has taught that the Genesis account of creation is a myth. This shocking situation is compounded by the fact that the ACU administration is unwilling to admit that there is a problem. Their attitude has been "It is none of your business and we are not accountable to the brethren for what we teach." — *Dub McClish, Pearl St. Church of Christ, Denton, TX.*

(This stormy affair at Abilene is more than "a tempest in a teapot," and it is fair to say that since the above letter the ACU administration reports that it has investigated the matter and has cleared the professors as charged. One professor in fact issued an un-Nixon like apology for allowing himself to be misunderstood, *very abject.* If you want ACU's statement, you can obtain one by writing to the president, ACU Station, Abilene, TX 79699. If you want Thompson's book, write Apologetics Press, 230 Landmark Dr., Montgomery, AL 36117, which is free gratis because of anonymous donors. My reaction to all this? If ACU is no part of the church and strictly a "private" institution as always claimed, why all this pressure from the church? On what grounds is ACU accountable to Churches of Christ? Here we see the underbelly of the Church of Christ in its true

"institutional" form, with the usual intrigue and subterfuge, such as professional scientists having to manipulate and equivocate (and suffocate!) in reference to what they really believe as scholars. Parochial institutions are rarely at liberty to teach freely and without fear of reprisal. If the teaching of evolution is shocking, as Dub McClish suggests, is it not also shocking for an honored Ph.D. to have to grovel and bow and scrape for what he teaches from heart and mind? If we are going to have a Christian university, it should first of all be a university! —*Ed*.)

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## BOOK NOTES

I am presently rereading *The Memoirs of Alexander Campbell* with delight and profit, and I am amazed all over again at how it reveals so much about our heritage. It is still in print, two volumes in one, and we can send it to you for $21.95 postpaid. Also in print in handsome edition is *The Campbell-Rice Debate*, which I am also reading again, in which Campbell reveals much about himself and the movement he led. It is 19.95 postpaid. If you are interested in our history, these volumes should be viewed as *must* reading.

Leanne Payne's *The Healing of the Homosexual* is a frank, sympathetic approach to homosexuality as a sinful condition that can be forgiven and healed through Christ. She treats homosexuals through "a healing of memories" which she believes is the secret of the problem. $3.50 postpaid.

We are still offering the five bound volumes of this journal, covering eight years of publication (1977 through 1984), that are still in print for only $35.00, which is a 25% discount. If you want only our last bound volume, *The Doe of the Dawn (1983-84),* the price is $10.50 postpaid.

A reviewer wrote to College Press, the publisher of *The Stone-Campbell Movement*, that while he disagreed with some of the conclusions he nonetheless found the book absorbing. "There are not many writers who can hold my attention through more than 700 pages, but Leroy Garrett did," he said. You too might find this study of your heritage interesting. We will send you a copy for $21.95, and that includes the postage if you pay in advance. You may receive a free bonus copy if you get up a list of eight subscriptions to this journal at $3.00 per name, total $24.00, and this may include your own sub or renewal.

We have an attractive, compact, rather small type edition of *The New King James Version* (all of the Bible) that is ideal to place alongside other versions for reference, and you should have the *new* KJV along with the old. And the price is right at $6.50 postpaid. A larger print text edition, sturdier binding of the New KJV is $13.50 postpaid.

An ongoing favorite of our readers is back in stock, *A Short History of the Early Church* by Harry Boer, which is exciting reading from the primitive church to the reign of Constantine. It is now $7.50 postpaid.

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Address all mail to: 1201 Windsor Dr., Denton, TX 76201*

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